

ACTIONS AND DECISIONS REQUIRED
IN THE SHORT RUN

IMMEDIATE

1. Staffing Choices

Given the systematic dispute within the U.S. Government, the new staffing of certain senior and mid-senior positions can partly determine not only the implementation of chosen policies but even the short-term evaluation of alternatives.

2. Initial Decisions for Paris Negotiations

(a) Forum Options:

(i) If seating dispute settled, accept the "two sides" - "four sides" compromise.

(ii) If seating dispute unsettled, continue current U.S. approach towards "two sides" - "four sides" compromise.

(iii) Press for a new forum (perhaps even if current seating dispute has been settled), e.g. a return to U.S.-DRV negotiations, encouraging GVN to deal separately with Hanoi and NLF.

Important: If a choice among alternative policies can be reached soon enough, the forum arrangement should be subordinated to this choice. This consideration might argue for a postponement in Paris talks.

(b) Instructions to U.S. Delegation

(i) Delay taking a specific position (new U.S. Delegate could discuss POW issue, Geneva Agreement, etc.).

(ii) Choose between insisting on

(a) mutual troop withdrawal, primarily in SVN, with a tentative position on Laos and Cambodia.

(b) a political settlement in SVN,

(c) a firm coupling a SVN and Laos troop withdrawal,

(d) combinations of above.

3. Budget Assumptions

An early commitment to a Vietnam policy through the budget submission can be avoided by accepting the Vietnam budget submitted by the outgoing Administration as an initial, provisional estimate. But when the time comes to justify the Vietnam budget items to Congress (about March) some of the policy choices will have to become explicit.

4. Initiating Specific Evaluations

Some critical uncertainties could be narrowed through specific evaluations. To have results in time for near term policy choices, these evaluations should be started soonest. The following is a tentative list (in several cases, studies might be available within the Government).

(a) Position to be taken in event of major enemy offensive.

What, precisely, are the understandings regarding the bombing halt. Apart from U.S. view, how is Hanoi likely to view these understandings.

In the event of new offensive, there will be suggestions for some resumption of bombing. What should be the response to these suggestions or requests from the field. If some U.S. withdrawal (say of 50,000 men) had been started, should it be halted?

(b) Recent Progress in RVNAF Build-up.

Transfer of equipment schedules, handling of equipment, trends in fighting frequency and style, defections by type, morale questions, possible RVNAF reaction to U.S. troop reductions. How should RVNAF function if U.S. troops went down to 100,000?

(c) Possible GVN countermeasures to U.S. policy choices disliked by GVN.

(d) Recent (1-2 years) history of tacit restraints along DMZ.

(e) Other Investigations and Policy Discussion.

(i) Exploit opportunities prior to 20 January for observation of VN situation and operations by trusted, experienced, disinterested reporters, on informal, discreet basis.

(ii) Prepare options and discussion paper, on basis of the present one, for sending to agencies for comment followed by NSC discussion.

SHORT RUN

1. Public Presidential Position

(a) Promise position in 3 to 6 months after full review, vs. delivery as soon as possible.

(b) Indicate merely main outline of chosen policy and parts that have to become public vs. "operation candor" to take public into confidence and to explain uncertainties.*

2. Relations with GVN

Bring relations in line with chosen policy alternative. Begin to instruct U.S. staff and shape U.S. support program accordingly. E.g., (a) support current GVN, putting stability over reform, (b) press GVN for reforms and/or negotiations with NLF, (c) provoke conflict with GVN in effort to bring neutralist government to power which will press for accommodation with NLF.

3. Prepare the ground with principal allies (Australians, Koreans, Thais) for policy changes affecting them.

* A public airing of the uncertainties and dispute within U.S. Government might offer certain advantages: later reversals would create less of a "credibility gap" since it would have been made clear from the outset that the U.S. Government does not pretend to know the future; and the conflicting views would, in part, be argued out among segments of the public instead of between the public and the Administration. On the other hand, such public airing of uncertainties might strengthen the enemy in his view that he can win through U.S. domestic dissension and it might also give the enemy more of a feel for our bargaining position.